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NSC BRIEFING

20 August 1957

MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

- I. The appointment of Communist ^{Maj.} Gen. Afif Bizri as chief of staff in Syria has profoundly disturbed pro-Western governments in the Middle East--especially Lebanon and Jordan.
- A. Top Lebanese officials, already concerned by what they consider threatening gestures by Syria along the Lebanese border, now say they feel in imminent danger of large-scale internal subversion, *which they doubt they can cope with.*
- B. They state that the number of Syrian subversives in Sidon and Tripoli--terminals for the oil pipelines from Saudi Arabia and Iraq--has grown very large.
- [1. The Lebanese doubt the ability of their own security forces to cope with these elements.]

II.

1. The cabinet must decide within one month which action to take.

D. These pressures against the King are the major factors in his decision to call on the UN Security Council in connection with a border dispute with Israel over an undemarcated area in Jerusalem.

III. Iraq and Saudi Arabia, less immediately threatened by the accession of leftist strength in Syria, have not reacted so sharply.

A. The Iraqis believe that some counteraction--~~as yet unspecified~~-- should be taken in concert with the West. *Iraqi royalty, visiting in Turkey, have proposed a high-level conference on Syria. The Turks have accepted.*
B. They, as well as our other friends in the area, see King Saud's attitude as a key to further moves.

1. Saud has recalled for consultation his ambassadors in Syria and Lebanon, plus his travelling emissary, royal councillor Yusuf Yasin, who accompanied him on his trip to the United States last winter.

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3. The King's stand may become clearer after he visits Nasr and Syrian President Quwatli in Cairo.

IV. It seems likely that even the Egyptians are not entirely pleased with the Syrian situation.

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B. The establishment of close, direct rapport between Moscow and Damascus leaves Cairo--and Nasr's ambitions of Arab leadership--to one side.

V. The present Israeli attitude is one of watchful waiting.

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B. So far, the Israelis do not appear to be taking extraordinary precautions.

C. Their attitude toward border disputes with Syria will almost certainly be as tough, if not tougher than ever.

VI. Inside Syria itself, the leftists are moving to tighten their grip, but the precise pattern their regime will assume is not clear.

A. The new chief of staff, Major General Bizri, had an undistinguished career until he served leftist purposes as judge in a series of conspiracy trials last year.

B. Colonel Sarraj, chief of army intelligence, probably remains the strong man behind the scenes.

C. President Quwatli's future is clouded.

1. Should he not return to Syria from Egypt, where he went last week with another stomach ailment and where he previously spent several years in exile, he could legally be succeeded by the president of parliament, another feeble politician.

2. A move to oust Quwatli might well be pushed by defense minister Azm, who led the Syrian team to Moscow and Prague to negotiate new arms deals.
3. His ambition is to become president of Syria regardless of the circumstances.

D. Purges of conservatives and neutral officers and senior civil servants are well under way.

VII. In Oman, the British are winding up the military phase of the rebellion there.

- A. Most of the British air and ground forces which moved to support the Sultan of Muscat's effort against the dissident Omanis had left the rebel area by 20 August.

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